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AUTHOR Boiarsky, Carolyn
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ABSTRACT

The object of this study was to develop a model from which Appalachian students can learn to differentiate between their dialectal pronunciation of certain vowels and the pronunciation of those vowels in Standard American English. A secondary objective of the model is to enable students to imitate Standard American pronunciation. The first phase of the study was concerned with identifying those vowels in which dialectal deviations occurred and in identifying the form in which these deviations manifested themselves. Four major deviations were identified. The study was also concerned with analyzing the consistency between students' pronunciation of these specific vowels and their spelling of words containing these vowels. Results indicated that a positive relationship between students' pronunciation and their spelling of these vowels existed. The second phase of the study was concerned with developing a method by which Appalachian students could learn to recognize those dialectal deviations identified in Phase One. An aural-oral approach using rhyme was developed. Results indicated that such a method was effective in helping students recognize the difference between their pronunciation of specific vowels and the pronunciation given these vowels in Standard American English. The appendix includes a prototype lesson. (Author/FWB)

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IMPROVING ORAL COMMUNICATION OF APPALACHIAN YOUTH THROUGH RHYME

BY
CAROLYN BOIARSKY

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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The study was made while the author was working with the Appalachia Educational Laboratory, (Charleston, West Virginia) and was conducted in cooperation with Mrs. Lorena Anderson, Director of the Division of Language Arts of the West Virginia State Department of Education, Charleston, West Virginia.

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Background

During the past one hundred years, the topography of Appalachia has led to the virtual isolation of the region, both economically and culturally, from the rest of the nation. This isolation has caused the spoken language of the inhabitants of the mountain area to develop separately from the Standard American English spoken by the majority of Americans. In fact, the pronunciation of certain basic words by Appalachian residents differs so markedly from that of Standard American English that the mountain man often has difficulty understanding those outside his community. Changes in the pronunciation of vowels, which is manifested in a tendency to reverse long and short sounds in specific words, appears to be almost as overwhelming as the Great Vowel Shift. Golden, whose findings are relevant to Appalachian children, though the studies were conducted in the South, notes "culturally disadvantaged children may substitute 'i' for 'e' in 'pinny' and the low front vowel 'ae' for 'ai' to confuse 'rat' with 'right.'"[1] Few studies, however, have been made specifically of the Appalachian dialect and those which have been conducted, have been concerned mainly with structural problems

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[1]Ruth I. Golden. "Ways to Improve Oral Communication," 'Improving English Skills of Culturally Different Youth', ed. Arno Jewett, Joseph Mersand, and Doris Gunderson, (Washington, D. C." U.S. Government Printing Office, 1964), p. 104.

and vocabulary rather than with phonemic characteristics. The first phase of the following study investigates the pronunciation of certain words by Appalachian students and analyzes the consistency between the Appalachian dialectal pronunciation of certain vowels and the spelling of words in which these vowels appears.

I. Consistency of Spelling and Pronunciation Deviations of Appalachian Students

Object: To determine the consistency, if any, between the Appalachian dialectal pronunciation of certain vowels and the spelling of words using these vowels.

Procedures: A spelling list of 24 three and four letter words was compiled from approximately 150 papers written by tenth-, eleventh,-and twelfth-grade students attending a rural high school in West Virginia in 1964. The students' IQ's ranged from 80 to 140. The words were selected because they were spelled incorrectly in numerous papers. Two words "filibuster" and "stimulus" were added to the list to determine how the students would pronounce and spell complex words which included similar sounds but with which they were not familiar.

The words were administered as a spelling test to all tenth grade students in the same high school in the fall of the 1966-67 school year, two years after the original set of papers used in compiling the spelling list had been assigned. This two-year gap ensured that an entirely new group of students would be exposed to the words. A total of 143 students took the test. Each word was pronounced, presented in a sentence, and pronounced again. The students who had taken the test were selected at random and asked to read the words into a tape recorder.

To provide a Standard English comparison base, the same spelling test was administered at the beginning of the second 1966-67 semester to 184 tenth grade students at a single high school in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. One half the students in each class recorded the spelling words the same day the spelling test was administered. The Philadelphia school was selected because the IQ range and the lower and lower middle class socioeconomic backgrounds of the students were similar to the population studied in Appalachia.

The results obtained from the spelling test administered in the Appalachia school were compared with the results obtained from the spelling test administered in the Philadelphia school. Comparisons of vowel pronunciations obtained from the tape recordings of the two groups were also compared.

Results and Discussion: Chart I presents the pronunciation and spelling performance of each group. The percentage of Appalachian students reversing long and short vowels is indicated in the first column. There were no such pronunciation deviations in the Philadelphia group. Four vowel shifts are immediately apparent in the Appalachian data.

1. [ɛ] is pronounced as [i] or [e];
2. [i] is pronounced as [ɛ] or [I];
3. [I] is pronounced as [ɛ];
4. [e] is pronounced as [ɛ] or [I].

Spelling errors are presented in terms of student percentages for each group. Errors reflecting dialectal vowel reversals are distinguished from total errors.

Chart II indicates the specific spelling variants of each word for the Appalachian sample. The number of students using each variant is indicated.

The spelling data in Charts I and II indicate that a large proportion of the errors made by the Appalachian students relate to direct characteristics. The Philadelphia students made appreciably fewer errors and those errors made were infrequently related to Appalachian dialect characteristics.

The data suggest that spelling and pronunciation patterns function as interdependent but separate systems. For example, in the Appalachian study the highest percentage of both pronunciation deviations and spelling errors occurred in the word still. Eighty-seven percent of the students pronounced the word as if it possessed a [i] . However, only 25 percent, a high percentage when compared to the Philadelphia score, spelled the word as if it possessed a [i] . In an effort to determine additional information concerning this word, fifteen Appalachian students, selected at random, were shown the two words, still and steal, and asked to say them aloud. All fifteen pronounced both words alike. They were then shown the written words and asked to define them. All 15 indicated that still meant motionless and steal meant to rob. The word steal was then spoken and they were asked to define it. All 15 said the word could have three meanings---to rob, to be motionless, and a metal. Finally they were asked to repeat the word still and then to listen to the word pronounced correctly. The majority recognized the difference in pronunciation immediately; however, very few were able to imitate the correct sound. The st blend appears to be one of the causes of the pronunciation deviation. The same deviation can be noted in the words stir and stare.

Note also the lack of consistency in the spelling and pronunciation of the word fill. While 79.5 percent of the students pronounced the word as if it possessed a [i] , only 4.1 percent spelled it as if it possessed a [i] . The closing L sound appears to be the reason for the high percentage of pronunciation deviations found in many of the words.

The small percentage of error in the two test words, filibuster and stimulus, is also interesting. Four Appalachian students were selected at

random and asked why they were able to pronounce filibuster and stimulus correctly when they had trouble reading and pronouncing much easier words. All four agreed that the reason was because they had heard it pronounced correctly the first time they had ever heard it; they had not grown accustomed to hearing it pronounced another way.

In sum, the data suggests that the Appalachian dialect as compared with standard dialect, is associated with spelling performance. Appalachian students expressed pronunciation deviations by reversing long and short vowels in all 26 words while Philadelphia students expressed no pronunciation deviations by reversing long and short vowels. Appalachian students also had a greater percentage of spelling errors, reflecting pronunciation deviations in all but one word.

It appears that whatever the students have learned previously concerning correct pronunciation and spelling is erased by their environment or is not being taught by the teachers who are, themselves, born and educated in the same area and who, therefore, use the same verbalisms. In either case, it appears that a new method, one emphasizing the aural-oral approach, should be initiated to help these students become aware of their pronunciation deviations. The second phase of this study is devoted to the development of such a method.

Chart I

PERCENTAGES OF PRONUNCIATION AND SPELLING ERRORS

Word	Appalachia			Philadelphia	
	Pronunciation Deviation	Spelling Errors		Spelling Errors	
		Dialect Related	Total	Dialect Related	Total
[ɛ] changes to [i] or [e] Group I					
Fell	54.8	2.8	5.6	0	.5
Well	77.0	0	.7	0	0
Wreck	4.3	4.2	4.8	10.0	14.1
Bet	26.4	7.7	7.7	.5	.5
Tell	62.8	2.7	5.5	1.0	1.0
[i] changes to [ɛ] or [I] Group II					
Feel	23.4	10.5	11.8	0	.5
Wheel	3.6	4.2	4.2	.5	.5
Steal	1.5	3.5	3.5	0	1.0
Beat	1.5	3.5	3.5	.5	.5
Heel	6.2	1.4	1.4	0	1.4
[I] changes to [i] Group III					
Will	64.1	.7	1.2	0	0
Still	87.5	25.9	39.8	0	1.0
Fill	79.5	4.1	4.8	0	0
Stir	31.2	6.2	10.4	.5	4.9
Bit	7.8	4.9	7.0	1.0	1.0
Hill	60.9	1.4	1.4	0	0
Filibuster	1.5	2.4	2.4	0	4.5
Stimulus	0	2.1	3.2	0	1
[e] changes to [ɛ] or [I] or [i] Group IV					
Stale	3.1	6.3	6.3	2.0	10.0
Whale	0	3.5	3.5	0	4.8
Fail	21.8	4.2	4.2	0	.5
Stare	10.9	10.4	10.4	0	7.0
Rake	9.3	9.8	9.8	3.9	6.3
Bait	1.5	2.4	2.4	0	0
Hale	3.1	1.4	1.4	0	.5
Tale	7.7	2.0	2.0	0	.5

Chart II

SPELLING ERRORS REFLECTING DIALECTAL DEVIATIONS AMONG APPALACHIAN STUDENTS

[ɛ] changes to [i] or [e] Group I

Fell	Well	Wreck	Bet	Tell
fail (1)	(0)	race (1)	beat (7)	teal (2)
feil (1)		wreak (4)	beet (1)	tial (1)
feel (1)		reek (1)	bate (2)	
			bat (1)	

[i] changes to [ɛ] or [ɪ] Group II

Feel	Wheel	Steal	Beat	Heel
fell (6)	whille (1)	stall (1)	bit (1)	hell (1)
fill (8)	whell (2)	stell (1)	bet (4)	hill (1)
fel (1)	whill (1)	still (2)		
	whel (1)	steil (1)		
	will (1)			

[ɪ] changes to [i] Group III

Still	Fill	Stir	Bit	Hill
steel (21)	feal (5)	stear (4)	bait (1)	heil (1)
steal (11)	feill (1)	steer (2)	bite (5)	hail (1)
stial (1)		stare (1)	beat (1)	
stile (7)		stair (1)		
steil (1)				

Filibuster	Stimulus	Will
failabuster (1)	steamulus (3)	weal (1)
feelabuster (3)		
felibuster (1)		

[e] changes to [ɛ] or [ɪ] or [i] Group IV

Stale	Whale	Fail	Stare	Rake
stell (2)	wheal (1)	fall (2)	stear (6)	rack (8)
stall (1)	whell (1)	feal (1)	steer (4)	reak (2)
steel (1)	wholl (1)	fell (2)	stire (2)	wreck (3)
still (1)	wheel (1)	fele (1)	star (2)	wrack (1)
steale (1)	well (1)		ster (1)	
steal (3)				

Bait	Hale	Tale
beat (4)	heal (1)	teal (6)
bat (1)	hall (1)	tell (1)
		till (1)

II. An Oral--Aural Approach to Improving Oral and Written Communication of Appalachian Youth

This phase of the study is concerned with developing a model from which Appalachian students can learn to differentiate between their dialectal pronunciation of certain vowels and the pronunciation of those vowels in Standard American English. A secondary objective of the model is to enable students to imitate Standard American pronunciations.

Procedures: A series of five pilot lessons, using an aural-oral approach, was designed. The curriculum was based on the concept that students, by listening to constant repetition of the accepted pronunciation of certain vowels, would not only become accustomed to hearing that pronunciation, but would, themselves, begin to adopt that pronunciation.

The pilot program was tested on groups of seventh-grade students in West Virginia. The participating junior high school was a feeder school for the high school which participated in the previous study. The lessons, which were of twelve minutes duration, were recorded on a portable tape recorder and there was no interruption by the teacher. Students were requested to repeat the words stated on the recorder. In an attempt to have the students compare their own pronunciations with those of the narrator, the class was devided in half. One half was instructed to listen while the other half pronounced the words. At the conclusion of the taped lesson the students were requested to write on a worksheet words which rhymed with the words presented in the lesson.

Each lesson was concerned with the pronunciation of specific phonemes. The vowels to be used were selected from among those of the previous study

and included [ɛ] [I] [e] and [i] , all of which preceded a final L. The first four lessons were concerned with words spelled i-l-l, a-l-e, and a-i-l, e-e-l and e-a-l, respectively. Lesson five was a review of the previous four. According to the previous research, Appalachian students pronounced words in lesson one the same as words in lesson three and words in lesson two the same as words in lesson four. Because of the students' inability to differentiate between these sounds, lesson five emphasized comparison of the vowels presented in the previous four lessons. All five lessons used the technique of rhyme to teach the standard vowel pronunciation. A limerick introduced each lesson and the five rhyming words contained in the limerick were used to exemplify the specific vowel being taught. Students were asked to repeat each of these words in a sentence which was delivered by the narrator and were also asked to repeat the word by itself three times successively.

Each of the four lessons differed slightly from the previous one, and each became progressively more difficult so that the students were constantly challenged. In lesson one, the narrator reads the limerick and asks the student to write down the last word in each line as it is repeated on the tape recorder. In the second lesson, the narrator, upon repeating the limerick, omits the last word in each line and the student is asked to write the last word on his worksheet. Lesson three includes an additional limerick in an effort to exemplify the two different spellings which can be given to words which have the same sound. Lesson four includes, within a single limerick, the words which have the same sound but which have different spellings. Lesson five includes all four sets of words, and students are asked to differentiate the spelling of the words as the narrator pronounces them. The

students are also asked to pronounce the words and to differentiate the pronunciation of the words.

Results

The program produced several interesting results. During the first lesson, although the teacher could hear a definite difference in the sounds, the majority of students were unable to distinguish aurally between the narrator's pronunciation of the vowels and their classmates' pronunciation of the same words. Another interesting result was that as the lesson progressed, the students began to adopt the narrator's pronunciation of the individual words. At the conclusion of the lesson, however, when the students were asked to repeat all of the words, they reverted to their original pronunciation.

The majority of the students did not realize that their pronunciation of e-l-l deviated from the accepted pronunciation until the conclusion of the lesson when they were asked to write words which rhymed with the words in the lesson. At this point, several students in each class asked whether the words had to be spelled the same as the words in the lesson. When the teacher asked them for an example of a word which would be spelled differently, but which would still sound the same, they gave a word with a [e] sound, e.g., mail. The teacher pronounced a word containing the [e] sound and then pronounced one of the words in the lesson. She also replayed a portion of the tape. It was at this point that the students recognized the difference between their own pronunciation and the narrator's pronunciation of e-l-l.

Another result indicated that both the students' interest and their listening potential improved after the first lesson. It had been noted

that approximately halfway through the first lesson, the students became bored. However, their interest was increased when they began the second lesson and remained high throughout this lesson. During the second lesson the students also became more attentive, listening to the narrator and each other's pronunciation of the vowels. This time many of them were able to differentiate between their classmates' pronunciation of the vowels and the narrator's pronunciation.

It appears that their recognition of the difference between their pronunciation and that of the narrator increased their interest in the lesson and their listening potential. It also appears that the use of rhyming words to help students differentiate sounds is valid.

Appendix

I. Teacher's Guide

Objective:

a. To teach students to be knowledgeable of certain vowel deviations in their own dialect by being able to identify both the deviations and the vowels as they are pronounced in Standard American English.

Students will be expected to

a. Differentiate between the vowels as pronounced by themselves and as pronounced in Standard American English.

b. Identify the degree to which their pronunciation of these vowels approximates that of Standard American English.

c. Reproduce the vowels as pronounced in Standard American English.

d. Improve by a significant percentage their reading of words which include these vowels.

e. Improve by a significant percentage their spelling of words which include these vowels.

II. First Prototype Lesson

TAPE

THERE WAS A YOUNG HIPPIE WHO FELL
IN LOVE WITH A GIRL WHO WAS SWELL.
HE WANTED TO TELL
OF HIS LOVE WITH BELLE,
BUT HE TRIPPED AND DROWNED IN A WELL.

THIS POEM IS CALLED A LIMERICK. IT DOESN'T MAKE MUCH SENSE; IT'S A FUN POEM. BUT LET'S GO BACK AND LISTEN TO THE POEM. AS YOU LISTEN, WRITE DOWN THE LAST WORD IN EACH LINE IN EXERCISE ONE OF YOUR WORKSHEET.

THERE WAS A YOUNG HIPPIE WHO FELL
IN LOVE WITH A GIRL WHO WAS SWELL.
HE WANTED TO TELL
OF HIS LOVE WITH BELLE,
BUT HE TRIPPED AND DROWNED IN A WELL.

NOW LOOK AT YOUR PAPER

THE WORDS YOU SHOULD HAVE WRITTEN DOWN

ARE -- FELL - SWELL - TELL - BELLE - WELL.

ARE THESE THE WORDS WHICH YOU HAVE WRITTEN

ON YOUR PAPER?

THESE WORDS ARE CALLED RHYMES - IN OTHER

WORDS THEY SOUND ALIKE.

THE WORDS ALL INCLUDE THE LETTERS E-L-L.

YOU WILL NOTICE THAT THESE THREE LETTERS ARE

WRITTEN FIVE TIMES IN EXERCISE TWO. YOU WILL

ALSO NOTICE THAT THERE ARE BLANKS IN FRONT

OF THE LETTERS. YOU ARE TO ADD THE

BEGINNING LETTERS IN THE BLANKS AS I REPEAT

THE WORDS.

FELL

SWELL

TELL

BELLE

WELL

YOU SHOULD HAVE ADDED THE LETTER F - TO FORM

THE WORD FELL, S - TO FORM THE WORD SWELL,

T - TO FORM THE WORD TELL, B - TO FORM THE

WORD BELLE, W - TO FORM THE WORD WELL.

ALL RIGHT, LET'S PRACTICE SAYING THESE WORDS.

THE FIRST WORD IS FELL. LET'S PUT IT IN A SENTENCE. LISTEN CAREFULLY SO THAT YOU CAN REPEAT THE SENTENCE. THE HIPPIE SLIPPED ON HIS LONG HAIR AND FELL. NOW YOU REPEAT THE SENTENCE. ALL TOGETHER. ONE. TWO. THREE.

DID YOU SAY FELL? COULD YOU HEAR A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE WAY I SAID THE WORD FELL AND THE WAY YOU SAID THE WORD FELL? LET'S TRY AGAIN. REPEAT THE WORD THREE TIMES.

ALL TOGETHER. ONE. TWO. THREE.

ARE YOU SAYING FELL? IF NOT, ASK YOUR TEACHER FOR HELP.

NOW LET'S GO ON TO THE SECOND WORD. SWELL. LET'S USE IT IN A SENTENCE. LISTEN CAREFULLY SO THAT YOU CAN REPEAT THE SENTENCE. THE NEW ENGLISH TEACHER IS SWELL. NOW REPEAT THE SENTENCE. ALL TOGETHER. ONE. TWO. THREE.

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DID YOU SAY SWELL? COULD YOU HEAR A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE WAY YOU SAID THE WORD SWELL AND THE WAY I SAID THE WORD SWELL. LET'S TRY AGAIN. REPEAT THE WORD THREE TIMES. ALL TOGETHER. ONE. TWO. THREE.

ARE YOU SAYING SWELL? IF NOT ASK YOUR TEACHER FOR HELP.

NOW LET'S GO ON TO THE THIRD WORD, TELL.

LET'S PUT IT IN A SENTENCE. LISTEN CAREFULLY, SO THAT YOU REMEMBER THE SENTENCE. THE BANDIT WOULDN'T TELL WHERE THE MONEY WAS HIDDEN.

NOW YOU REPEAT THE SENTENCE. ALL TOGETHER. ONE. TWO. THREE.

DID YOU SAY TELL? COULD YOU HEAR A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE WAY YOU SAID THE WORD TELL AND THE WAY I SAID THE WORD TELL? TRY AGAIN. REPEAT THE WORD

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THREE TIMES. ALL TOGETHER. ONE. TWO THREE.

ARE YOU SAYING TELL? IF NOT, ASK YOUR TEACHER FOR HELP.

LET'S GO ON TO THE FOURTH WORD. BELLE. LET'S USE IT IN A SENTENCE. LISTEN CAREFULLY SO THAT YOU REMEMBER THE SENTENCE. A GIRL NAMED BELLE LIKES TO RING BELLS. NOW YOU REPEAT THE SENTENCE. ALL TOGETHER. ONE. TWO. THREE.

DID YOU SAY BELLE? COULD YOU HEAR A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE WAY I SAID THE WORD AND THE WAY YOU SAID THE WORD BELLE? LET'S TRY AGAIN. REPEAT THE WORD THREE TIMES. ALL TOGETHER. ONE. TWO. THREE.

DID YOU SAY BELLE? IF NOT, ASK YOUR TEACHER FOR HELP.

NOW LET'S LEARN THE LAST WORD. WELL. HERE'S THE SENTENCE. LISTEN CAREFULLY SO YOU WILL REMEMBER IT.
THE BOY GOT WATER FROM THE WELL.

NOW YOU REPEAT THE SENTENCE. ALL TOGETHER.
ONE. TWO. THREE.

DID YOU SAY WELL? COULD YOU HEAR A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE WAY I SAID THE WORD WELL AND THE WAY YOU SAID THE WORD WELL? LET'S TRY AGAIN. REPEAT THE WORD THREE TIMES. ALL TOGETHER. ONE. TWO. THREE.

ARE YOU SAYING WELL? IF NOT, ASK YOUR TEACHER FOR HELP.

NOW LET'S GO BACK OVER ALL THE WORDS. FELL - SWELL - TELL - BELLE - WELL. NOW YOU SAY THEM. ALL TOGETHER. ONE. TWO. THREE.

DO ALL THE WORDS SOUND ALIKE? DO THEY SOUND THE SAME AS THE WAY I SAY THEM? IF NOT, ASK YOUR TEACHER FOR HELP.

LET'S GO BACK TO THE LIMERICK. DO YOU REMEMBER IT?

THERE WAS A YOUNG HIPPIE WHO FELL
IN LOVE WITH A GIRL WHO WAS SWELL.

HE WANTED TO <u>TELL</u>

OF HIS LOVE WITH <u>BELLE</u>,

BUT HE TRIPPED AND DROWNED IN A <u>WELL</u>.

TURN TO EXERCISE THREE IN YOUR WORK BOOK.

NOW EVERYONE READ THE LIMERICK ALOUD.

ALTOGETHER. ONE, TWO, THREE.

DO THE WORDS SOUND ALIKE? ARE YOU SAYING

THEM THE WAY I SAY THEM?

NOW TURN TO EXERCISE FOUR IN YOUR WORKBOOK.

WHAT OTHER WORDS DO YOU KNOW THAT SOUND LIKE

THESE WORDS? WRITE THEM IN THE SPACE

PROVIDED.

DID YOU THINK OF THESE WORDS? SELL - CELL -

SHELL - YELL - SMELL - DWELL - SPELL -

KNELL - JELL - QUELL - DELL.

IF YOU HAD ANY OTHER WORDS ON YOUR LIST,

ASK YOUR TEACHER TO CHECK THEM. NOW TURN

TO EXERCISE FIVE.

STOP THE RECORDER.

DIRECTIONS TO THE TEACHER: EXERCISE FIVE MAY BE DONE AS PART OF THE CLASSWORK OR AS HOMEWORK.

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III. Workbook

EXERCISE I

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

EXERCISE II.

1. _ELL

2. _ELL

3. _ELL

4. _ELL

5. _ELL

EXERCISE III.

THERE WAS A YOUNG HIPPIE WHO FELL

IN LOVE WITH A GIRL WHO WAS SWELL.

HE WANTED TO TELL

OF HIS LOVE WITH BELLE,

BUT HE TRIPPED AND DROWNED IN A WELL.

EXERCISE IV.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

EXERCISE V.

All the words in Exercise IV are rhyming words; they all sound alike. Can you make up some short poems using these words?

EXAMPLE: LET'S RING THE BELL

THE CAT'S IN THE WELL